

Stanborough School

Lemsford Lane, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6YR

Inspection dates 10–11 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership and management are good because leaders, managers and the governing body have improved students' achievement and the quality of teaching. This is an improving school.
- Most subject leaders have proved to be effective in driving school improvement.
- From their broadly average starting points students make good progress and achieve well by the time they leave the school.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well because teachers are aware of their needs and adapt their lesson planning appropriately.
- Teaching has accelerated students' progress because most teachers plan their lessons well and check that students understand what they are learning.
- Students' behaviour is good and they are proud of their school. They are polite towards each other and their teachers. They feel safe in school.
- Students' attendance is just above the national average and they arrive punctually to school.
- The curriculum offers a wide range of courses and qualifications which cater well for students' particular needs and interests.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development very well.
- Students are provided with good careers information and guidance.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress and make a positive contribution towards the life of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is a small amount of weaker teaching that does not consistently challenge all students in the class.
- The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and others in the school has not closed completely.
- Academic targets for some students are not adjusted regularly to ensure they remain aspirational.
- Some teachers' marking is not precise enough to help students improve their work.
- Some students do not always present their work neatly enough.
- When teaching fails to engage all students, a very few can adopt negative attitudes towards their learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 38 lessons. They observed teaching and scrutinised students’ work. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors on joint visits to classrooms to observe students’ learning. Inspectors also visited a number of lessons more briefly to observe the teaching of disabled students and those who have special educational needs or to focus on attitudes to learning.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, subject and year leaders and groups of students. Inspectors also met with the Chair and two other members of the governing body, and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority which provides support to the school.
- Inspectors considered the views of 89 parents through the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. They also considered the views of four parents who communicated their views via email. Inspectors took into account comments from 23 members of staff who responded to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the school improvement plan and self-evaluation summary, records of students’ progress and attainment, records of behaviour and attendance and minutes of meetings of the governing body. Inspectors also scrutinised the school’s records of recruitment checks of staff.

Inspection team

John Daniell, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Irene Bishop

Additional Inspector

Grainne Grabowski

Additional Inspector

Linda Lyn-Cook

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Stanborough School is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The sixth form provision is operated through a collaborative arrangement with four other local schools.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average at 19%. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is also well below average at 9%.
- The proportion of boys in the school is higher than average at 58%.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is slightly below the national average at 26%. These students are eligible for pupil premium funding, which is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- At 12%, the proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below the national average.
- No students in the school attend any offsite provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and students' achievement outstanding by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan lessons which consistently challenge students of all abilities
 - accelerate the progress of disadvantaged students so that the remaining gap in attainment between these students and others in the school closes
 - regularly review academic targets for students so that they are always aspirational and challenging
 - insist on high levels of presentation in students' books
 - ensure teachers write their comments when marking students' work in sufficient detail to ensure students know how to respond and to show they have understood what they got wrong
 - set the highest expectations for students' attitudes towards their learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders identified what they needed to do to make Stanborough a good school. The school improvement plan has effectively tackled the weaker aspects of the school so that it is now providing a good standard of education. Behaviour is consistently good and the great majority of students are keen to learn and succeed. Leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance is accurate.
- Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire believe that the school is well-led and managed. Staff have confidence in the school's leaders and managers. The headteacher's vision for the school, as one which is fully inclusive, is clearly conveyed to staff, students, parents and carers.
- The quality of subject leaders is good. They lead their areas of responsibility well. Subject leaders are held to account through regular meetings with their line managers so that they can be challenged in relation to the quality of teaching in their areas, and the performance of different groups of students.
- Teaching is managed well. Because of their consistent approach towards the raising of standards, leaders have secured improvements both in the quality of teaching and in its impact on students' outcomes. However, some weaker teaching has not been fully eradicated, particularly in science. Leaders maintain detailed records for each teacher so that appropriate support and challenge can be provided. Inspectors agreed with senior leaders' views on the impact of teaching when jointly observing students' learning.
- Students of all abilities and from all backgrounds are treated with respect. The school promotes equal opportunities well, and its tracking systems ensure that every aspect of students' achievement is monitored regularly. The school has used the pupil premium funding carefully to support disadvantaged students but leaders acknowledge that there remains a gap in attainment between these students and others in the school.
- Students are provided with good quality careers information and guidance. Transition arrangements, for students joining the school or entering Key Stage 4 or the sixth form, are effective. No students are currently not in education, employment or training.
- The choice of subjects offered to students is well-planned to meet students' interests and learning needs. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well managed. This is a strong aspect of their education at Stanborough. The house system encourages healthy competition. Students are offered a wealth of opportunities to participate in the life of the school through music, drama and sport. The annual School Council Conference allows students an opportunity to discuss issues which they feel are important to them. They are currently consulting on the design of the school uniform.
- School leaders engage with parents and carers well. The 'Stanborough Times', a weekly update on school news, aims to keep them informed of the school's successes. The school's website is detailed and informative.
- The school has received good support from the local authority in the form of a consultant and other advisers, and has acted purposefully in response to the guidance offered. The advisers have worked well with the English, mathematics and science departments to improve the quality of teaching and to strengthen the leadership of these subject areas.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have gained a better insight into the performance of subject areas by attending discussions on students' academic outcomes in individual subjects. Governors' minutes make clear that, at these meetings, governors put challenging questions about the performance of different groups of students to both senior and subject leaders in order to hold them to account.
 - Governors know how the pupil premium funding is spent and what impact it is having on narrowing the

gap between disadvantaged students and others in the school.

- They have a clear picture of the quality of teaching and how it is being improved, and ensure that only those members of staff who meet their targets are rewarded through enhanced salary and promotion.
- Governors play a full part in promoting the school's values and ethos of tolerance, respect and equality of opportunity among all stakeholders, including leaders, staff, students and parents.
- Together with other leaders, governors ensure that the school's procedures for the safeguarding of children meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. This view is shared by most parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire.
- Students behave sensibly when moving around the school and between lessons. They are polite and welcome visitors to the school, regularly opening doors and greeting them. There is very little litter around the school because students show respect for their school environment and for the many high quality displays in classrooms and in the corridors.
- Students show largely positive attitudes towards their learning. This is because the teaching they experience is mostly engaging. They come to their lessons with the correct equipment. Low level disruptive behaviour is a rare occurrence and is usually due to teaching that does not fully engage their interest or when they are taught by temporary teachers.
- Students understand the school's behaviour policy well and most teachers apply this policy consistently in the classroom.
- No student has been permanently excluded from the school for a number of years. The proportion of students who are excluded for fixed periods of time has steadily reduced. Leaders have compiled clear evidence, in the form of cases studies, to demonstrate the good work the school does with more challenging students and the positive impact this has on their behaviour.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. There is a good staff presence around the school during morning break and at lunch time. Staff are clear about their role in keeping children safe. They receive regular updates about the safeguarding of children.
- Students have a good understanding of e-safety and the risks involved in the use of the internet, particularly of social networking sites. They say they feel safe in school and that staff listen to their concerns. This view is shared by an overwhelming majority of parents.
- Bullying is a rare occurrence but when it does happen, students are clear about who they should report it to and are confident that it will be dealt with swiftly and appropriately.
- Students who are vulnerable told inspectors they enjoy coming to school and feel safe and cared for. Case studies shown to inspectors support the students' views that they receive good quality support, including from a school counsellor, and make gains in their learning.
- Attendance has risen to just above the national average. The proportion of students who are persistently absent from school has been reduced and students' punctuality to school has improved.
- The school prepares students well for living in modern democratic Britain. An Imam recently talked to students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form about Islam and the dangers of radicalisation. One student in Year 10 said 'To learn about Muslim rules and thinking cleared up some misconceptions and made me aware of what many Muslims are taught. I also like the way the Imam did not 'sugar coat' Islam and did admit that it did have its problems, but he did explain well, and more clearly than many other ways, that

Islam does not support extremism’.

- Many students cycle impressive distances to school, and some told inspectors they would welcome additional training on travelling safely to school on their bicycles.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now generally good in both English and mathematics and overall. This has secured accelerated progress for students. Most teachers plan for learning well by considering the needs of different groups of students, particularly disabled students and those who have special educational needs. One student commented that ‘teachers go that extra mile’ to ensure we do well in school.
- Teachers use a range of effective strategies for checking that students understand what they are being taught. They emphasise the importance of students taking responsibility for improving their learning and have sharpened students’ skills in self-assessment so that they can do this.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and relationships between teachers and students are positive. Provision for students’ literacy, including reading and writing, and mathematics, is good. Where teaching is most effective, students are keen to learn, enjoy the lessons and make considerable gains in their learning in these subjects and others.
- Teachers regularly set students homework, which extends their learning. Most students record the homework they are set in their planners.
- Where teaching helps to deepen students’ understanding most effectively, teachers make good use of questioning, and quickly reshape their teaching if it becomes clear that not all students have understood.
- Teachers provide students with regular opportunities to work in pairs and groups. Teaching promotes students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. In a Year 11 lesson, where students were learning about nuclear fission, the teacher showed a recording of the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. These students were visibly moved by the impact of this disaster on local inhabitants and those who live further afield.
- Teachers diligently mark students’ books regularly. They provide guidance for students on how they can improve their work. However, many of these comments lack detail or do not require students to respond in such a way that they show students have understood what they have got wrong; consequently, they do not always learn from their mistakes.
- Although most students take a pride in their work, a small number of students’ books are messy and the presentation of their work is untidy. A small minority of students do not behave as well as the majority, when teaching does not fully engage their interest.
- Where teaching is weaker, it does not always challenge students of all abilities. A small number of teachers do not consistently plan lessons which challenge the most-able students. For example, in one Key Stage 4 class, which was grouped by ability, the most-able students were offered a choice of tasks, some of which were targeted at achieving a C or D grade at GCSE. Some teachers do not adjust students’ target grades quickly enough, even when these have been achieved.

The achievement of students

is good

- Achievement is good because students enter the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average and make good progress by the time they leave. In 2014, provisional unvalidated data show that the proportion of students who achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics was 60%.

- The school is rightly proud of the fact that 100% of students in Year 11 achieved 5 or more A* to G Grades at GCSE in 2014.
- The school encourages as many students as possible to gain a double GCSE (Level 2) qualification in science. Results in 2014 show that the proportion of all students achieving two Level 2 qualifications is approaching the national average.
- The achievement of the most-able students is generally good. These students aspire to achieve the highest grades at all times and, in most cases, receive good levels of support from the school to enable them to do so. However, on occasion, the level of challenge for these students drops because work set is too easy or not adjusted once it has become clear that students are ready to move forward.
- Initiatives targeted at students eligible for additional support through pupil premium funding have been successful. Teachers know who these students are and take their needs into account when planning their lessons. As a consequence, they generally make steady progress. GCSE results for 2014 show that disadvantaged students attained around two thirds of a grade lower than others in the school in English and mathematics. When compared to students nationally, the attainment gap was around half a grade in English and two thirds of a grade in mathematics.
- Strategies used to narrow the gap between disadvantaged students and others in the school have been moderately successful. They include one-to-one and small group tuition in English and mathematics, a 'raising aspirations' coach who worked with two groups in Year 11 and the use of a school counsellor. The gap between these students' attainment and other students nationally is narrowing but the equivalent gap in school remains significant.
- The Year 7 'catch-up' premium is used effectively to improve students' weak literacy, reading and numeracy skills. Students enjoy reading and weaker readers' reading ages have improved through targeted support.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well in the school. Teachers plan to meet the particular needs of these students well so they make the progress they should. The special educational needs co-ordinator tracks students' progress closely.
- Students who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups achieve better than similar students nationally. Boys achieve as well as girls.
- The school does not operate an early entry policy for GCSE examinations.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Achievement in the sixth form is good because students make good progress from their starting points. Teachers' strong subject knowledge makes a positive contribution towards students' learning. They achieve particularly well in mathematics, modern foreign languages and media studies. They achieve less well in psychology and science subjects.
- Students are rightly proud of the sixth form. Their attendance is high. They value the good choice of subjects on offer and the opportunity to follow courses both in their own school and as part of the consortium arrangement. Students are provided with an appropriate amount of time to deepen their understanding through private study, which forms part of their weekly timetable.
- Inspectors saw good learning taking place in sixth form lessons and work that was marked in detail. This enables students to rectify their errors and carry out further independent research.
- Students are provided with a range of opportunities to develop their own leadership. Many support younger students with their learning in classes. All students are involved in enrichment and ambassadorial work for the school, raising funds for charities and promoting the school in the wider community.

- Sixth form students receive impartial careers advice and are very well prepared for the next stages in their lives, whether this takes the form of apprenticeships or higher education. Students aspire to go to some of the prestigious universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.

- Strong leadership of the sixth form has brought about a positive work ethic on the part of students. Senior leaders, managers and the consortium co-ordinator support students well and intervene in a timely fashion if they need advice or are in difficulty. Students' progress is monitored carefully and they are appreciative of the support and guidance they receive.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137847
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	453053

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1084
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matthew Buckley
Select	Peter J Brown
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2013
Telephone number	01707 321755
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